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ABSTRACT

The first Seminario Internacional Sobre la Educacion Bilingue (International Seminar on Bilingual Education), under the aegis of the National Association for Bilingual Education and the Mexican secretary for public education, brought together professionals from Canada, the United States, and Mexico in Oaxtepec, Mexico in November 1986 to share ideas, interests, and points of view on bilingual education. This report on the meeting summarizes the historical developments in bilingual education in the countries represented, research issues of current concern, and characteristics of current practices from participants' viewpoints. Issues addressed in work sessions included: the concern of some Native American tribes that their languages not be put in written form; insufficient use of the native language by teachers, and students' short exposure to bilingual education; the need for a theory of bilingual learning based on schemata; needs of both handicapped and gifted bilingual children; and native language loss among Mexican Indians. Great differences in the social, linguistic, and political contexts for bilingual education were revealed, but most notable were the contrasting philosophical perspectives of the governments and the pedagogical responses of their institutions. (Author/MSE)

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SOME RESEARCH-BASED ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS EXPRESSED AT THE SEMINARIO INTERNACIONAL SOBRE LA EDUCACION BILINGUE

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The first Seminario Internacional Sobre la Educacion Bilingue, held in Oaxtepec, Morelos, Mexico in November 1986 under the aegis of the National Association of Bilingual Education and Mexico's Secretaria de Educacion Publica, brought together some 65 researchers from Canada, the United States, and Mexico. They shared current research findings and discussed policy issues in bilingual education faced by each country. Great differences in the social, linguistic, and political contexts for bilingual education were revealed, but most notable were the contrasting philosophical postures of these governments and the pedagogical responses of their educational institutions.

The research issues related to bilingual education are numerous and varied, but assume greater range and depth in the context of an international symposium. Such was the case when the first Seminario Internacional Sobre la Educacion Bilingue, under aegis of the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) and the Mexican Secretaria de Educacion Publica (SEP) brought together representatives from Mexico, the United States, and Canada to share ideas, experiences, and points of view on bilingual education. This paper focuses on research and research-based related ideas, conclusions, and recommendations made in Oaxtepec, Morelos, Mexico during November of 1986.

A summary of the historical developments of bilingual education in the countries represented and characteristics of current practices from the point of view of the participants follows.

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The bilingual situation in Canada(1) was characterized by an increase in linguistic diversity. In the 1960's Canada established a Commission on Bilingualism to deal with the challenges presented to education and government by this heterogeneity. Canada's official policy is bilingualism within a multicultural framework. French and English are the country's official languages, but there is no official culture. Canada views itself as a linguistic and cultural mosaic (as opposed to the "melting pot" notion in the U.S.). Canadian society consists of approximately one-third native Anglophones; one-third native Francophones; and one-third native speakers

of other languages, called heritage languages, spoken by indigenous persons. Immigrant groups make up the fractions to equal 100 percent.

While Anglo-conformity still exists in the educational system, clearly the attitude towards bilingualism and bilingual education has become one of enrichment. Remediation through bilingual education is not the goal. Immersion in Canada emphasizes the minority language, and that superficial comparisons between U.S. and Canadian versions of the immersion model forget to mention that in Canada bilingualism, not transition or language replacement, is the goal of bilingual education. Bilingual education is seen as a way to extend the franchise, promote educational achievement, and forge a national unity.

Mexico(2), was characterized as one country in which linguistic diversity is primarily among the indigenous peoples. There are approximately 8 million indigenous people in Mexico, approximately 56 tribal groups, most prominent in the northern and southernmost states. Most of these tribes were not actually conquered -- neither by the Spanish nor by their mestizo descendants -- and so do not demonstrate the problems, psychological or social, of a defeated group. They simply maintain their cultures and languages in the process of ordinary, daily living, by and large.

It was indicated that Mexican Indians have not been overwhelmed because there is a certain tradition of indigenists (indigenistas) that began with the "conquistadores" themselves. From the very beginning there were Spaniards and, later, Mexicans who spoke in behalf of Indians and who fought for Indian rights against those who would have subjugated them to achieve their own visions of national unity. Moreover, it was reported that Mexico now officially recognizes its multicultural-multilingual character, and prides itself for it. Hence, Mexico appears to represent a more balanced view, seeking on the one hand to extend full educational opportunities and "castellanizacion" throughout the country while involving the indigenous peoples themselves in the process, accepting their identities, and reinforcing their cultures. Mexican educators believe that the process cannot be effectively carried out without the active, prescriptive participation of each community and its bilingual teachers, and are committed to finding "adequate pedagogies" (pedagogias adecuadas), and explicitly reject all forms of "aprendizaje violento" (imposed learning) which they believe can only compromise ethnic identity and damage the individual personality.

The report from the United States (3) revealed that the history of bilingual education is essentially compensatory, i.e., a pedagogy based on a

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deficit hypothesis. Numerous political struggles have historically surrounded the bilingual education movement and are currently expressed in the English-only/English- first movement. It was emphasized that some states might eliminate all languages but English from the schools if they could.

It was opined(4) that the U.S. possesses the greatest potential educational resources, but seems to be the furthest behind in its attitudes toward bilingual education and in its appreciation of cultural diversity. Bilingual education as usually practiced in the U.S. was described as transitional. This, coupled with the pressure to see results in English achievement tests quickly, was perceived to be responsible for many abuses. These include the nominal labeling of programs as bilingual when in fact there is little or no use of native language for instruction, and the premature consequent exit or reclassification of children, to their later academic detriment. The result is that subtractive bilingualism has become a hidden agenda. The schools' unwillingness to modify mainstream education in any way but to relegate limited English proficient (LEP) students to compensatory programs illustrates the second-class status of language-minority students.

At the recent period of U.S. educational history when minority-background educators were entering the public school systems in unprecedented numbers, certain steps were taken in the name of educational excellence which served to inhibit this trend, e.g., teacher competency testing. By not allowing the complexion (literally) of public education to change, the status of the public schools in the majority voter's eyes might perhaps not be diminished, or so it would seem. An interpretation of these developments given was that key United States policymakers have used governmental resources to suppress all expressions of ethnic ascendancy in the public schools in order to preserve public confidence in and financial support for these institutions. Bilingual educators are left to wonder if the schools intend to enhance the education of non-dominant ethnic groups or to limit their social mobility and participation in U.S. society.

Research Issues

While there were several research papers presented at the Seminario Internacional, numerous research-related points were also made throughout the sessions.

From Canada(5) some provocative ideas in the use of computers to

promote reading and writing as ways to develop academic skills were discussed. The discussion centered on ways in which students can interact with other students locally and in remote sites through computers. Cost-efficient examples included international students exchanging, planning and executing joint study projects through computer networks. Such exchanges through the medium of computers stimulate thought and cross-cultural understanding in very meaningful ways, thus promoting a humanizing education while developing academic skills.

Also from Canada (6) a concern was presented about curriculum and program evaluation of Indian education. It is apparent that evaluations of these programs did not take into account any local goals but used Anglo standards of student achievement exclusively. There are 65 indigenous languages in Canada, but most groups are small, isolated, and deeply divided. They comprise some two percent of Canada's population. Although there is widespread use of compensatory education for indigenous children, only 20 percent or so of them are LEP. Indians who receive a formal education often refuse to speak their native language when they return home because their L1 has not matured and they would be ridiculed if they were to speak it. It is unfortunate indeed that formal schooling compromises indigenous children's native language and cultural participation.

A study (7) of the education of indigenous peoples in Mexico shed doubt on the efficacy of the current Mexican ideology toward indigenous populations. It was expressed that only the test of time will determine the government's true willingness to teach literacy in the native languages of indigenous tribes.

It should be noted that no other presentation galvanized the participants' perspectives quite as much as Bilingual Education Research: Searching for a Paradigm, a Mission, and a Future (8). The author maintained that current evaluation and research studies have inadequate designs and need a radical shift in focus from whether bilingual education works to the investigation of how new educational technologies can be used in the classroom and how cognitive and information processing theories can be made relevant to bilingual teachers, how bilingualism can become a window into the human mind. It was stressed that these types of issues have not been dealt with by bilingual researchers because they lack a paradigm for investigation, hence a randomness of pursuit for knowledge has resulted. There is a need to define critical knowledge issues, not educational or policy issues. A new paradigm would lead research to a "higher level."

Bilingual researchers lack a Mission, such as the health professions have seeking a solution to particular diseases. While excellence in education is a Mission, bilingual education and Head Start are missions, viewed as special and easily criticized. The result is that funds to carry out adequate research in bilingual education are not available. Instead the only real Mission in compensatory education is cultural homogenization. Bilingualism is acceptable for the cosmopolitan and educated elite but it is to be eradicated for all the rest.

The above presentation concluded with the observation that without a research base, policymakers are free to formulate laws and regualtions to fit their own agendas. A Mission must surface to capture the interest of these policymakers, and a research paradigm must be formulated which is more closely tied to research and development (R & D) than to program evaluation. The goal should be to produce a language-competent society.

Participants highlighted the fact that no paradigm per se has been proffered. Disagreement was voiced over the idea that knowledge, educational issues, and policy concerns could be easily divorced from each other. Any new paradigm for research should look at these three elements simultaneously. R & D was viewed as an activity closely related to evaluation, since it is inevitable for bilingual education to be scrutinized for effectiveness. Questions were raised regarding current scientific research methodologies capacity to deal with all the complex variables found in classrooms. A belief that the general population of the U.S. will not give educators a mandate for bilingual education, irrespective of what evidence for its effectiveness in uncovered, permeated the discussion.

The need to provide a political-historical perspective to study bilingual education was emphasized. Otherwise, researchers would substitute more "scientific" approaches for social science research efforts and thereby produce a pseudo-science. Another concern pointed was that the evaluation of programs tantamounts to an evaluation of bilingual education. Federally mandated evaluations are often conducted prematurely, i.e., before the bilingual programs have had a chance to bear fruit.

The participants articulated the general tenor of the meeting. There was a consensus that any new paradigm for research should enrich appropriate social science methods so that complex phenomena such as bilingualism and bilingual education can be explored to the fullest.

Work Session Reports

The different sessions on research, teacher training, and programs generated a number of research-related ideas or considerations.

A concern that some Native American tribes do not want their languages to assume written form, was expressed. This would make their languages accessible to non-Indians, and they do not want to lose their languages by sharing them (10).

Participants expressed that the insufficient use of LI by teachers, and the short exposure to bilingual education are some of the reasons why in the U.S. bilingual programs have failed to produce good results. For bilingual programs to succeed, they must be integrated into the regular curriculum, and materials of equal quality must be available. Bilingual education must lose its remedial connotation, and to achieve this its advocates must enlist the support of middle class Americans by demonstrating that bilingual education has a payoff for their children as well.

The need for a theory of bilingual learning based on schemata was expressed. Such a conceptualization could account for changes in the mind as a result of experience, and help explain the obvious transfer of learning evident in more mature persons who are in the process of acquiring a second language. Furthermore, it could explain how in a linguistically appropriate environment, an active and involved LEP student can use his/her repertoire of secure schemata to acquire new ones while maintaining a sense of dignity.

Handicapped bilingual children were not overlooked at the Conference. One report(14) indicated that there are no differences on Piagetian conservation tasks between monolingual and bilingual groups of educable mentally retarded (EMR) Spanish- speakers. This implies that bilingualism does not adversely affect the cognitive performance of these children as in the case of non-handicapped students. Thus the common wisdom of teaching LEP EMRs in English was not supported. A concern was expressed in relation to gifted students. There appears to be a research basis to support the use of culture-specific definitions of giftedness to select children for these programs. Such definitions require further research, since there is a notable lack of appropriate diagnostic materials for non-mainstream, linguistic and cultural groups.

An additional issue related to research findings on Mexican Indians and the aspirations of Mexico's bilingual programs was voiced. Traditional educational efforts are responsible for the fact that many Mexican Indians --

according to their parents, their teachers, and a review of academic measures -- have not become adequately fluent in Spanish and have lost some fluency in their native languages. However, it was expressed that Mexico realized that it must build the native languages of these children and that the only way to achieve equity for language- minority children is through a bilingual program whose clear goal is language maintenance.

Conclusion

Several conclusions based on research and the Canadian experience were drawn(16). They are:

1. Bilingual education is a national resource, hence learners and their parents must be given a choice about participation in either transitional or maintenance programs.

2. Research and evaluation (R & D) models for bilingual programs should lend themselves to accountability and basic research.

3. While there are tests and techniques for estimating children's language proficiency, new scales which are more clearly developmental need to be prepared.

4. Some mental skills necessary to do well on certain kinds of tests are test-circumscribed skills and have little or no relation to real life. Instead, the development of different cognitive profiles may prove more appropriate.

Furthermore, it was clear that the three countries represented very diverse settings, attitudes, and practices vis-a-vis bilingual education and language-minority populations. What was interesting however, was how receptive the participants were to the more professionally daring and politically liberal ideas which either grew out of research or were proffered for their heuristic value. What began as an orchestration of potentially interesting general topics, specific papers, and thematic roundtables quickly evolved beyond that point. Succeeding presentors seemed to find new energy from previous presentations and appeared to build upon them, thus modifying and enhancing their prepared talks. There was a definite departure from traditional thinking, attitudes, and praxis at the Seminario, and a tendency to see research, evaluation, and curricular innovation as complementary. This cross-national meeting was notable for both the generation of new ideas and the affirmation of the need for more holistic and politically unapologetic approaches to the field of bilingual education research and practice.

Commentators

1 Jim Cummins presented the Canadian perspective.

2 Miguel Limon Rojas presented the Mexican perspective.

3 Ricardo Martinez standing in for an ailing Joshua Fishman, reviewed the educational situation in the United States.

4 Ernesto M. Bernal (USA).

5 Jim Cummins (Canada).

6 Barbara Burnaby (Canada).

7 Gabriela Coronado (Mexico).

8 Written by Amado Padilla (USA) and presented by Clementina Pateno Gregoire.

9 Michael Canale (Canada).

10 Janice Schroeder (USA).

11 Gina Cantoni (USA and Italy).

12 Hugh McKeon (Canada).

13 Jean Handscombe (Canada).

14 Marilyn Johnson (USA).

15 Rafael Gamallo (Mexico).

16 Michael Canale (Canada).

17 Alexis Lopez (Mexico).